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CANADIAN AUTOCRACY

AND

BRITISH DEMOCRACY

Robert Borden has set his feet in the path Paul Kruger trod to his undoing, and it is for all Canadians without distinction of race or party to consider what it means to them collectively and individually. It is the age old way of Autocracy, no good road. In its beginning it resembles the primrose path, and we all know where that leads to. The words of Solomon are equally applicable to either:—"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death." In it John Lackland found his nickname, and Charles Stuart, lost his head. By obstinately and persistently following it, a King of England severed from the Empire the fairest British possession. In that path Rehoboam divided Israel from Judea. There is no need to multiply instances, for they are written large

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in the history of all nations. Rudyard Kipling truly wrote, "Many feet have worn it, and the road is old indeed." The trumpets of Democracy, that sounded by the isle of Runnymeade, and round the scaffold at Whitehall, give warning that wherever and whenever Autocracy raises its head, though the crown is veiled and the sceptre hidden, though the fashion of the lies that cloak it is changed Autocracy is unalterable and unteachable, for step by step, and word for word, so the old kings did.

Autocracy consists in government with absolute power careless of the will of the people, by either an individual or associated individuals, and it is a question of no relative importance how the power and position were originally obtained. An autocrat elected by the people is as truly an autocrat as though he ruled by self-election or Divine right, and the same applies to any governing body. A great statesman defined it as distrust of the people tempered by fear. It claims to govern the people for their own good, as being wiser than they, and as possessing special information that it is impossible or undesirable to impart to them.

Democracy means government by the people, and is as distinct from Ochlacracy or moblaw as the socialism which is exemplified in the post office is from the anarchism that would

destroy all institutions. Under constitutional government the people rule through representatives elected to represent them for a stated term, bound in honor to hold to their election pledges, and to remember that their duty is to act as representatives of the electors, not to substitute their own ideas for the views of those they represent. Abraham Lincoln, in memorable words gave a definition of Democracy, as government of the people, by the people, for the people, and to that definition nothing material can be added. Another great statesman defined it as trust in the people, tempered with prudence. When not only his own fate as President and the fate of his party, but also the fate of the Union hung in the balance, Abraham Lincoln made no attempt to defer elections but trusted the people with the happiest result.

The franchise is not a reward or gift which it is within the power of any government to grant or withhold, but a sacred right of which no qualified voter can justly be deprived and to which all women are entitled equally with men whenever the people decide on extending the suffrage to them. If one woman is entitled to the suffrage, all are, for fancy franchises cannot be reconciled with democratic principles, nor what is more important, with even-handed justice. The grand old Chartist prin-

ciple of one man, one vote, with all votes of equal value, will in due time be extended to one person, one vote, each vote counting alike. The franchise cannot justly be given to those that have no right to it as Canadians, whatever service they may have rendered to the Empire or even to Canada.

In the bitterly fought struggle for the extension of the franchise in the United Kingdom I was old enough to participate. I was in England when Hyde Park railings came down, and the common people won the right to be represented. I heard the reply of the people to the age old claims of Autocracy. "If they will not rule us as we wish they must be made to do so." I remember the extended franchise being condemned as a leap in the dark, and have lived to see from it only the happiest results. I have seen the autocratic House of Lords oppose the will of the people expressed through the democratic House of Commons, with a fine contempt for the consequences conveyed in unparliamentary language, and have seen as a consequence the Lords deproved of their autocratic power. I have lived to hear the most Conservative British statesmen declare that the will of the people must prevail. Now I find that autocracy which has been driven out of England and the United Kingdom has gained a footing

and found a new home on another continent in the land of my adoption. It is well for Robert Borden that he has not Englishmen to deal with. He should have noted how careful the British Government was to make sure that it had the people with it, before extending the life of parliament or enforcing conscription.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide, and the time is now fast approaching when the Canadian people must decide between Autocracy and Democracy, for becloud it as you may, that is the real issue. Of course the more immediate one is which political party will be returned to power for five years to come, and there is also the secondary one of whether our boys at the front shall be reinforced by willing volunteers or unwilling conscripts. The people will see to it that they do not lack adequate support. I and many others like me, who have a son at the front, or it may be in the case of others sons or brothers, or one dearer than either, are quite ready to trust the people for that. Very many think double pay, increased pensions, better conditions, more consideration, and wiser and better organized recruiting methods than in the more recent past, especially the lukewarm ones that have obtained in Canada since conscription was sprung on the people, would be more efficacious than com-

pulsion. I would ask those who think conscription must be enforced at all costs, if they really believe that the case is so exceptional that the end justifies the means. I would ask those that grudge the necessary outlay if they would conscript men and not wealth, if they would force one man to give up a good position and comfortable income for little over a dollar a day, and allow another to remain under no equivalent burden of taxation. Take a man with a salary of $2,500 a year for example, that cannot qualify for active service, or that can escape it, what special tax does he pay in consideration of not risking his life in the trenches and retaining his position and salary? None whatever. If conscripted as fit for service, he loses both position and income. How many ablebodied munition workers can you get for a dollar and ten cents a day, all found, but no extra pay for overtime? We have the answer of the government about both pay and pensions. To better pay, a flat refusal, to increased pensions, deferred consideration, to conscription of wealth, a ridiculously inadequate income tax. The Germans are basing their hopes on starving Great Britain and incidentally the British soldiers and Canadian volunteers in the trenches and at the front. Few in Canada give this a thought but the British Government knows how serious

the situation is. With Americans going forward in thousands and Britishers coming over the line to enlist in hundreds it is quite a question as long as there are ample Canadian reinforcements still in England, whether our first duty is not to conscript men for shipbuilding and wheat growing. I would like to see any government try it at fighting wages and on war conscription terms.

As we all know Harry Lauder gave what he held dearest in the world—his son. Few know the government asked him for one thing more. That he would help them to induce people to limit the household use of bread to the absolutely necessary. He has told the people they may know what it is to starve, that it is also possible that our brave boys may have to go over the top hungry. He told them he spoke not as a Scotch comedian, but as a simple man of the people.

Thoughtless as the trout that takes the angler's fly, the voter that cannot see beyond the bait of conscription, which has little indeed to do with winning the war, may find too late that he has swallowed the hook of autocracy, and strange as it may seem that the three letters w-a-r in the label on the bait really spell election. Those who can swallow fancy franchises, being simple enough never to suspect they were given for a purpose, or who think the disfranchisement of

those who for many years past have thrown in their lot amongst us, and shown themselves good citizens, is justifiable, had better vote for those that are responsible for such innovations. Those that feel perfectly satisfied with all the government has done in regulating food prices and many other matters, will no doubt do so. For myself I know that the end can never justify the means, or injustice bear good fruit till figs grow on thistles. The franchise has been given to those who have no right to it, and taken from those that have every right. No good can come of such unprecedented and unjustifiable action. The end is not yet.

ED. HARPER WADE.

Quebec, September 25th, 1917.